

Administration of Barack Obama, 2015

**Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Fundraiser in Portland,
Oregon**
May 7, 2015

The President. Hello, Portland! Oh, I am excited to be in Portland! Hello, hello, hello! Hello!

Audience member. I love you!

The President. I love you back!

Well, everybody, have a seat, have a seat. Make yourselves comfortable. Now, first of all, I appreciate I appreciate whoever arranged for the really excellent weather. Somebody told me it never rains in Oregon. [*Laughter*] But it is spectacular. As we were flying in, you had Mount Hood and the greenery. And I don't want to go, now that I'm here. But it turns out, I've got this job, it's really demanding. [*Laughter*] So—but I will have to come back.

It is wonderful to see all of you. Thank you so much for the extraordinary hospitality. There are a couple of people that I want to start off by acknowledging. First of all, you've got as wonderful a congressional delegation coming out of here as anybody. And I want to start off by thanking a—your senior Member of Congress here, who has just been a great friend—one of my earliest supporters, supported me when people could not pronounce my name. [*Laughter*] And I'm so grateful to him for everything that he's done. He does a great job for you; Earl Blumenauer is here. Give—where's Earl? There he is back there.

And outstanding Member of Congress now who's really just doing great work every single day, representing your values and what you care about, Suzanne Bonamici. Give her a big round of applause. Where's Suzanne? Right here.

Kurt Schrader is traveling overseas, but give him a big round of applause anyway. We love him. And the chair of the Oregon Democratic Party, Frank Dixon, is here. Along with some outstanding college Democrats who are here in the house, the next generation!

Now, I just have fond memories of this place because—I told a number of people before I came out onstage that maybe my favorite event of the entire 2008 campaign was the rally we had here in the park along the waterfront. A lot of you were there. It was a perfect day. It was the only rally I had in which you had kayakers and—see this guy here was, "Yeah, I was out there on a kayak." [*Laughter*] But it was spectacular. And I've had a soft spot for Oregon and Portland ever since.

When you think about the distance we've traveled since that time, it's pretty remarkable. Yes, I am more gray than I was at the time. [*Laughter*] So that is one, significant change, although, as I pointed out, Michelle has not changed at all. [*Laughter*] She has this special mirror in our house; she won't let me look at it. [*Laughter*] So there's some sort of pact that she's made. [*Laughter*]

So I'm a little older; I've got a few dings and dents here and there. But when we came to that rally, as beautiful as it was, as extraordinary of a day as it was, those were scary times. We were entering into what proved to be the worst financial crisis in our lifetimes. And we were losing 800,000 jobs a month. The prospects not only of Wall Street collapsing, but more importantly, Main Street collapsing, were very, very real.

And 6½ years later, because of the incredible resilience and strength and tenacity of the American people, and because so many of you worked so hard to give me the opportunity to put in place some smart policies, we are able to reverse those trends.

We've now seen 5 straight years of job growth, the longest private sector job growth in our history. The unemployment rate has gone from 10 percent to 5.5 percent. An auto industry that had flatlined is now going on all cylinders. And we are not only making some of the best cars in the world, but we're selling them all around the world.

At the time when we had that rally, a lot of folks were concerned that Washington wasn't taking seriously the imperatives of our environment and the need to grapple with climate change. And since that time, we have doubled our production of clean energy. We have increased solar energy by tenfold, wind energy by threefold, doubled fuel efficiency standards for our cars. And as a consequence, we've been able to significantly reduce the trend lines in terms of the carbon pollution that is heating the planet.

At the time that we had that extraordinary rally, there were millions of people around the country who didn't have health care at all and people who, if they lost their job, because of a preexisting condition, would not be able to get health care. And today, because of the work that you did, there are 16 million people who have health insurance that didn't have it. And everywhere in the country, if somebody has a preexisting condition, insurance companies cannot turn them away.

At the time that we fought for this, it was predicted that this would break the bank and drive our deficits up. And yet, low and behold, health care costs have actually increased at the lowest rate in 50 years. And by the way, the deficits have come down by two-thirds since I came into office.

The Recovery Act that helped us avoid a Great Depression was the biggest investment in infrastructure, the biggest investment in education, the biggest investment in green technology, the biggest investment in NIH. And as a consequence, people were put back to work, jobs were saved, and the economy started coming back.

And as we look to the future, we've initiated the kinds of reforms that are going to be critical to our future. We've revamped our student loan program so that we expanded Pell grants, allowing millions of young people who couldn't afford to go to college before to go to college. And we are now working to make sure that young people, when they are going to college, have the information they need to keep their debt levels lower and have repayment systems that allow them to make repayments in an affordable way and allow them to choose professions like teaching because they're not going to be burdened so much with debt.

At the—in terms of our younger kids, reading scores are up, high school graduation highest on record, college attendance highest on record.

And so here's the bottom line: That was a nice day in the park, but it was also a moment in which we were fighting for America's future. And America is better off because of the work that you did. America is stronger than it was; it is safer than it was. Because of what you did, there are people around this country that have jobs that didn't have it before and have health care that didn't have it before and are attending college who didn't have a chance before.

You've made a difference. And I always said back then that change doesn't come from the top, change comes from the bottom up. And the people here in Oregon, the people here in Portland are as good representatives as anybody of the power of ordinary people coming

together and making a decision that they can change their country. You have brought about extraordinary change.

Now, here's the thing. We've got a lot more work to do. For all the progress that we've made, despite the fact that we ended "don't ask, don't tell" and despite the fact that we have gone after the practices of paying women differently for doing the same job and the changes that we're beginning to make in terms of our criminal justice system—despite all the reforms that we are initiating, we all know we've still got a lot of work to do. Because the fact of the matter is, is that although the economy has recovered, there are still a lot of folks out there that are hurting. Wages and incomes still aren't going up as fast as corporate profits. They're still not going up as fast as the stock market has gone up. The middle class still feels squeezed, and the ladders to get into the middle class have become scarcer for a lot of people who are willing to work hard, but can't seem to get ahead.

And so our challenge now is not just to have recovered from crisis, but now it's to seize the future and make sure we've got the kind of America that we believe in, an America in which anybody, no matter where they come from, no matter what they look like, no matter what their last name is, no matter what faith they practice, no matter who they love, that this is an America in which if you are willing to work hard and take responsibility, you can make it here in America. That's what we're fighting for. [Applause] That's what we're fighting for.

So what does that mean? Concretely, what are the steps that we still have to take? Well, we've still got to put more folks back to work. And we've got to make sure that folks who are working are getting paid a decent wage and have decent benefits. And that's why we're fighting so hard to make sure that we increase the minimum wage all across this country.

That's the reason why we think it's really important to have paid sick leave for people. There are 43 million people in this country who don't have it, and that's not right.

That's the reason why we're going to keep on making sure that there's equal pay for equal work all across America.

That's why, working with Earl and Suzanne and others, we need to start rebuilding our infrastructure all across this country, putting people back to work right now, rebuilding our roads and our bridges, but also our broadband lines and creating a smart grid that can save energy and help us to curb climate change. We've still got more work to do to put people back to work.

And one of the things that we need to do to put people back to work is make sure we are accessing the markets of the future. So part of what I'm going to be doing tomorrow at Nike is talking about how important it is—95 percent of the world's markets are outside our borders. We've got the best workers in the world, the best universities in the world, the most innovative companies in the world, the best scientists and research in the world. So we are not afraid of competition. We are concerned if the playing field is not level. And that's why we've got to have the kinds of enforceable, tough, fair trade deals that are going to make sure that American workers and American businesses aren't locked out of these markets.

That's part of a middle class economic agenda, and it is a priority for us. We've got to make sure it happens.

We've got to make sure that we are training our young people for the jobs of the future. And that's why I've proposed to make sure that the first 2 years of community college in this

country are free, just like public high school, so every young person can at least get that kind of start for the jobs of the future.

And for folks who still want to go on for four years, it's not bad having 2 years free. That will cut our debt—student debt that is such a burden on so many young people all across this country. So that's got to be a priority.

And we've got to make sure that early childhood education is our priority, because we know that young people, when they get a chance early on in life, it is the best investment we can make. Every dollar we invest in early childhood education means higher graduation rates, lower teen pregnancy rates. It means that kids are going to do better. They are going to be successful citizens. They'll pay taxes. We will get that money back. They're not going to be going straight from school to jail, they're going to be going into college, and they're going to be going into jobs. And that's the kind of America that we want. That's what we believe in.

We still got to make sure we get comprehensive immigration reform passed in this country. I couldn't be prouder of the work that we've done through executive actions to make sure that our young DREAMers—young people who were brought here as children and are Americans just like our kids, except they don't have the right documents—the notion that we would be keeping them in the shadows made no sense.

But we've got to solve that larger problem, and only Congress can do that. And you've got some great Members of Congress who understand that. Now, we've got to get all Members of Congress to understand that, and we've got to get that thing passed. It's the right thing to do. It's good for our economy, and it upholds our tradition as a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants.

We're going to have to keep—we're going to have to tackle climate change. We've got some folks in the Senate right now who think because we get a snowy day, they bring in snowballs into the Chambers and think that's science. *[Laughter]* I'm not a scientist, but I know a lot of scientists. I can understand science. And what the science says is that our planet is warming in such a way that it is going to increase drought and it is going to increase wildfires and it is going to displace millions of people around this planet and increase the severity of floods and hurricanes and it will cost lives and it will cost our way of life and it could affect the incredible natural bounty that Oregon represents. And that's not the kind of America I want to pass on to our kids and our grandkids.

That's why we're taking actions through the EPA to make sure that we cut carbon pollution that's produced from power plants. It's the right thing to do.

And we're going to keep on investing in clean energy, because that is not only critical to our environmental future, but it's critical to our economic future. There are jobs to be had for those countries that are first to figure out how to harness the power of the Sun and the wind and store it properly and distribute it properly. And I want that to be America. I want those jobs to be right here in the United States. I want those jobs to be here in Oregon. That's what we're fighting for.

So we got a lot of stuff to do. And I hope you're not tired. *[Laughter]* Because I'm not. People sometimes ask me—they ask me, you've got so much stuff on your plate. I mean, we just talked about domestic issues. Obviously, internationally, we have ended two wars, but we still have to bring about peace and help deal with situations from Ukraine to Iraq, to making sure that in places like Latin America and Asia, they continue to see America as a beacon of leadership.

So people say, Mr. President, no wonder you look so old. *[Laughter]* And they ask you, how do you just keep at it every day? And I tell them, at least once a day, I meet people who, because of the work that we did, have seen their lives transformed.

Before I came out here, there was a young man who told me that before the ACA was passed, he was paying \$3,000 a month for the drugs that he needed to take every day to stay alive. And today, because of the Affordable Care Act, not only can he afford those drugs, but he knows that if he had to change jobs he'll be able to get access to what he needs. That will keep you from getting tired, hearing something like that.

Mother's Day is coming up. Yesterday I called some moms. I get these 10 letters every single day; out of 40,000 that we receive, 10 get to me. And so for Mother's Day, we decided we were just going to call, as a surprise, three moms who had written me letters. One of them was a waitress, two young kids. They had written me on President's Day, because mom was trying to teach the two boys about doing good deeds, and part of their good deed was encouraging the President of the United States. *[Laughter]*

And she wrote and took the time, along with her sons, to say, thank you for the good work you're doing. Now, here's somebody who's working on her feet every single day, undoubtedly underpaid, then having to come home and look after a couple kids, took the time to say thank you to me. I can't afford to be tired, because I want to make sure that she's getting the kind of wages and benefits that she deserves. And if she gets sick, I want to make sure that she can stay home. And if her kids get sick, I want to make sure that she can look after them and not lose a day's pay. That's why I'm not tired. We've got work to do.

The young man in college who comes to me and says, you know, I—as a gay teen, I was bullied and thought about suicide, and seeing all the changes that have taken place and the recognition and the acceptance and the love that we've seen sweep across this country has made such a big difference in my life. That's why I don't get tired, because I want that young man to feel loved.

Those wounded warriors who I see at Walter Reed, some of them lost a leg, some of them lost two. And then, 6 months or 8 months or a year later, they come into the White House, walking on their new legs, and looking me in the eye, standing up straight and shaking my hand. And I think about the sacrifices that they've made and realize that we've got to serve them just as well as they have served us. That's why I don't get tired.

So—but here's the thing, Democrats. I can't do it alone. And I've run my last election. Michelle is very happy about that. *[Laughter]* But that doesn't mean I stop fighting.

I think it was Brandeis who said, the most important office in a democracy is not the President, not a Senator or Governor or mayor, it's the office of citizen. And what was represented at that park back in 2008 here in Portland, that was people holding office. That was people holding the office of citizen and saying that we are joining together to make sure that America is living up to the ideals that we care about so deeply.

Pretty soon, I'm going to be a citizen myself, not just a President. I'll be alongside you. And we're going to have to make sure that we keep people like Earl and Suzanne, make sure that we've got a Democratic President and a Democratic House and a Democratic Senate. We've got to make sure that we are fighting for the things that we believe in so that when we look back 10 years from now or 20 years from now or 30 years from now, or when our children and grandchildren look back, they can say that we were part of that incredible race that has

been run and we took the baton and we carried it forward to make this a more just, more prosperous, more secure, more tolerant, more generous, more loving nation.

That's what we're fighting for. I'm going to need you, Democrats. Not just today, not just next week or next year, but as long as you hold that incredible office of citizen.

Thank you very much, everybody. I love you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:56 p.m. at the Sentinel hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Coon Rapids, MN, resident Stephanie Tarr, Tucson, AZ, resident Dawn Miller, and Ormond Beach, FL, resident Patricia Church; and Kai and Kenny Jones, children of Ms. Tarr. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the audio was incomplete.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Democratic National Committee fundraisers :: Portland, OR.

Locations: Portland, OR.

Names: Blumenauer, Earl; Bonamici, Suzanne M.; Church, Patricia; Dixon, Frank; Jones, Kai; Jones, Kenny; Miller, Dawn; Obama, Michelle; Schrader, Kurt; Tarr, Stephanie.

Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S. : "Don't ask, don't tell" policy, repeal; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Casualties; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; Business and industry : Global competitiveness; Business and industry : Wage discrimination; Civil rights : Wage equality; Commerce, international : Free and fair trade; Commerce, international : U.S. exports :: Expansion; Democratic Party : Democratic National Committee; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Early childhood education programs; Education : Postsecondary education :: Affordability; Education : Postsecondary education :: Community colleges; Education : Postsecondary education :: Pell grants; Education : Postsecondary education :: Student loans, repayment options; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Job training and assistance programs; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies :: U.S. production; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies :: Promotion efforts; Energy : Carbon dioxide emissions, reduction; Energy : Fuel efficiency standards, strengthening efforts; Energy : Greenhouse gas emissions, regulation; Energy : Solar and wind energy; Environment : Climate change; Foreign policy, U.S. : Peace efforts, expansion; Health and medical care : Cost control reforms; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Holidays and special observances : Mother's Day; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Labor issues : Minimum wage; Labor issues : Paid family and sick leave; Labor issues : Workplace flexibility, improvement efforts; Law enforcement and crime : Criminal justice system, reform efforts; Oregon : Democratic Party events; Oregon : President's visit; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts.

DCPD Number: DCPD201500345.